

SGT William C Dempsey Jr.—Radar Mechanic

My cousin was a Bombardier in the Air Corps and was on furlough in Little Rock after being made a 1st Lieutenant. I recall thinking his uniform seemed quite fancy. I enlisted from West Helena, Arkansas in September of 1943; I figured I would have been drafted, otherwise. I was sent to Sheppard Field in Wichita, Kansas. I washed out of the “Fly Boy” Cadet program, and went to Truax Field in Madison, WI; then on to Chanute Field, a U.S. Army Air Corps Technical School in Rantoul, Illinois for Radio School; then to Radar school in Boca Raton, FL, and finally to Walker Field in Kansas, where I was assigned to the 330th Bomb Group. My first flight experience was on a B-17 equipped with an APQ13. I also had the opportunity to go to Cuba prior to Guam.

Flying via a C54, I arrived in Guam on April 12, 1945—the day President Roosevelt died. We landed on the main airfield and then went by truck to the north end. Initially we were in tents, during heavy rains or if a hurricane came through, there would be lots of water inside our tent—a foot deep! Later, we had to build our own barracks; I was happy to be out of a tent.

The Radar improved over time; one of the additions to Radar that I recall, was a bombing capability—so that the Radar Operator could take over for the Bombardier. Otherwise, any updates were regarding the APQ13. “B-29's were equipped with improved H2X radar developed by Bell, Western Electric and M.I.T with the nomenclature AN/APQ-13, designating ground scanning radar. The USAAF adopted the British technique of night attacks making the use of radar essential. The radome was carried on the aircraft belly, between the bomb bays and was partially retractable. Unfortunately, the retracting motor gave quite a few problems and that lead to streamlining the radome shape and made it non-retractable. It operated at a frequency of 9375 ± 45 megacycles and used a superheterodyne receiver. The radar was used for high altitude area bombing, search, and navigation. Computation from bombing could be performed by an impact predictor and Range Unit permitted a high degree of accuracy in locating beacons.” (source: The National Electronics Museum website, <http://www.hem-usa.org/past-gallery.shtml> (last visited Apr 24, 2010)).

The Radar Operator could use the APQ13 during bombing if the Bombardier's optical sight failed. In addition to maintaining the plane's Radar, we took care of the Altimeter and Loran.

In regards to the flight line, I was in charge of four fellows and 6 planes. We worked 12 hours on and 12 hours off. I also remember having “Guard Duty” on the flight line and having my Carbine with me. We had plenty of supplies and I don't recall feeling too much pressure or stress. I remember, while working on K-29, I found a piece of flak embedded into the Radar Operators table. Occasionally, during pre-flight, we would have to rush out and fix something, but that was rare as our units were pretty reliable. Another memory I have is of the planes returning from their Missions—very few planes seemed to land with all four engines still operating; I saw one land on only two engines.

When not working, I would play cards, handball (which I hadn't heard of until then), softball; or go watch a movie—while sitting on a coconut log. I did not have a camera, so I don't have many photos of our time on Guam. I did not keep a diary.

I remember one time we drove a Jeep to visit an inlet at one of the native villages and there was a Jap submarine beached along the shore; it was rusted and rather small.

After 30 months, I was discharged; it took about three weeks to process—we were on a very slow ship, which first went to Saipan and then to Oakland, CA, from there I took a train to Fort Smith Arkansas where I was discharged. Upon returning home I worked in a local plant. On the G.I. Bill I studied Electrical Engineering at the University of Arkansas.

